

Advertising and illustrated poetry in the new literary ecosystem: a survey in the frame of *YouTube*

Publicidad y poesía ilustrada en el nuevo ecosistema literario: un estudio en el marco de *YouTube*

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Received:
21/08/2018

Accepted:
30/04/2019

ISSN: 1885-446 X
ISSNe: 2254-9099

Keywords:
Literary Education; Publicity;
Poetry; Social Media; E. E.
Cummings.

Palabras clave:
Educación literaria; publicidad;
poesía; medios sociales; E. E.
Cummings.

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Abstract

Many researchers have recently highlighted the emergence of a new literary system and reading paradigm in which school is losing prominence in favour of new ways of mediation, such as the social networks and the Internet. Within this changing situation, the present work is focused on a Calvin Klein's eau de cologne "Eternity" advertisement, where a poem by E. E. Cummings plays a main role. It can be thus considered a special case of illustrated poetry, insofar as verses and images come together for constructing the meaning, as it happens in poetry picture books as well. In fact, it is compared with a picture book illustrated by Mati McDonough based upon the same poem, in order to demonstrate its similarities. Considering that, this advertisement could provoke aesthetic responses in the viewers, although they are not immersed in a conventional literary context such as school or book reading. So, in order to confirm that hypothesis, we analyse the comments of *YouTube* users about the advertisement. The results show that most comments do focus on the aesthetic aspects of the advertisement, albeit not on literary ones. However, it leads thus to the conclusion that, because of this aesthetic potential and its similarities with poetry picture books, it could be an adequate instrument for literary education, especially with the right reading mediation.

Resumen

Son varios los especialistas que han llamado la atención sobre la existencia de un cambio de paradigma en la mediación lectora en el que la escuela no es ya la principal prescriptora de lectura y las redes sociales y la web cobran cada vez más protagonismo. En el marco de esta cambiante situación, este trabajo se centra en un anuncio de la colonia de Calvin Klein "Eternity", en el cual un poema de E. E. Cummings desempeña un papel fundamental. Puede ser, por tanto, considerado una manifestación particular de poesía ilustrada, desde el momento en que versos e imágenes se alían en la creación de sentido, como ocurre en el álbum poético. De hecho, en el presente estudio dicho anuncio es comparado con un álbum de Mati McDonough que adapta el mismo poema. Teniendo esto en cuenta, este anuncio podría provocar respuestas literarias en los receptores, aunque no estén inmersos en un contexto convencional de lectura, como la escuela o los libros. Así, para confirmar esta hipótesis, se analizan los comentarios acerca del anuncio por parte de usuarios de *YouTube*. Los resultados muestran que la mayoría de los comentarios es de tipo estético, aunque no específicamente literario. Sin embargo, todo ello lleva a la conclusión de que, debido a su potencial estético y a sus similitudes con el álbum poético, el anuncio puede ser un adecuado instrumento para la educación literaria, especialmente con la mediación adecuada.

Senís, J. (2019). Advertising and illustrated poetry in the new literary ecosystem: a survey in the frame of *YouTube*. *Ocnos*, 18 (2), 7-16.

doi: https://doi.org/10.18239/ocnos_2019.18.2.1779

Introduction: poetry and advertising

We may constantly note references to advertising in poetry throughout the 20th century; although their origin can be tracked back to the artistic and literary vanguards (Dick, 2010), they definitely turn become part of the very nature of Postmodernity and Pop Art (Ponce-Cárdenas, 2007; Ferradáns, 2001). But the presence of poetry within advertising is also parallel, constant, not only due to the fact that advertising language uses certain resources of literary language in order to have a persuasive effect (Escribano-Hernández, 2010 & 2011; López-Suárez, 2007; Spang, 1997), but also because its speech sometimes makes literary references its own (Vilar-Pacheco, 2007) to appeal to the recipient's intertext for purposes that are linked to consumerism.

Additionally, the increasing importance of illustrated literature within the literary domain, which is not only limited to works for children, has articulated a new paradigm in the publishing world. In the specific field of poetry, poetry picture books are a subgenre that has recently experience a certain publishing boom and a experienced interest in certain journals (Neira-Piñeiro, 2012, 2013, 2016, 2018; Ramos, 2014; Senís, 2014; Silva, 2010). For this reason, the increasingly consolidation of illustrated poetry publications raises questions about the potential educational and literary implications of this phenomenon whereby lyrical texts are adapted to other formats, more attractive to people who do not read frequently and are probably more prone to survive in the "unfinished dialectic of the digital model" (Cordón-García, 2018, p. 468).

In this context, the use of poetry in advertising can be analysed in connection with illustrated literature. In both cases, it is a very similar adaptation process by which an original text is linked to *ad hoc* images and results in a hybrid object of an unquestionable aesthetic value. Additionally, through the dissemination of advertisements in the social media and platforms such as Youtube, the scope of adver-

tisements with poetic content gains a new dimension within the framework of the literary environment. Especially, depending on the answers of potential "prosumers" in non-formal reading spheres of the "change in the paradigm in communication and reading" (Lluch, 2018, p. 46), which involves a transformation in reading mediation (Cruces, 2017; García-Canclini, 2015; Lluch, 2010, 2014, 2017, 2018; Martín-Barbero, 2010; Roncaglia, 2018; Zafra, 2017).

Method and objective

The results of a study on a specific case conducted in the context of the links between poetry and advertising in the new reading environment are presented in this work. It is about an advertisement of "Eternity" eau de toilette, by Calvin Klein, where an excerpt of the poem by E. E. Cummings, *I carry your heart with me*, is inserted. It is directed by the director Cary Fukunaga, featuring Jake Gyllenhaal, top-model Liya Kebede and a little girl aged four or five years old, and is made up by a succession of black and white pictures of a family, combined with verses of said poem using the soundtrack. The advertisement was broadcasted by television companies in several countries, and the brand made it also available to all YouTube users on 19th October 2017.

By studying this example of the use of poetry in advertising, we intend to achieve two different objectives, although they are directly linked.

In the first part, we will be analysing the advertisement as a manifestation that is similar to illustrated poetry. This way, we will try to show that this product is comparable to a poetry picture book from an aesthetic point of view, given that different artistic and adaptation strategies are used therein and that it may arise aesthetic and literary responses among the recipients thereof. To that end, let us compare the advertisement of "Eternity" and a small-format picture book, *I carry your heart with me* (2014), illustrated by Mati McDonough, an adaptation of Cummings' poem. We will thus rely on

the existing literature on poetry picture books and illustrated literature.

We will subsequently analyse specific responses to the advertising by classifying the comments after it was posted on YouTube. In particular, we will verify if reactions are mostly of an aesthetic nature and if any specifically literary responses arise within the former, i.e., we will see if the recipients react to the presence of specific poetic language. Therefore, we will determine if this advertisement could become an educational-literary instrument.

Results

Poetry and images: mediation, adaptation and interpretation

According to the classification of poetry picture books created by Neira-Piñeiro (2012) in her recent studies on this lyrical subgenre, there is one type which consists on adapting an already existing poem to the picture book format. This manifestation is peculiar for several reasons set forth hereinafter.

In first place, this phenomenon takes places in poetry both for children and adults, as the publication of illustrated editions of poetry classics has experienced a boom in the literary field in recent years. In second place, as stated by Neira-Piñeiro (2013, 2016) herself, it is a non-reductive adaptation process, because generally poems are not shortened or modified. Therefore, as a third significant aspect, adaptation is performed through three phenomena that are directly linked. On one hand, the poem is decontextualised, as it is drawn from the place where it was originally published and is introduced into a new medium to create a new reception space. On the other hand, the original text is segmented and sequenced in smaller units in order to adapt it to this new medium. In last place, the poem is clearly recontextualised by inserting it in a different format (the picture book) and through use of illustrations. Illustrations are as important as the text itself,

as they provide an unavoidable interpretation that the reader discovers as he/she reads the verses. This process is similar to the one that takes places when reading picture books (Arizpe & Styles, 2004; Bader, 1976; Bosch, 2007; Duran, 2009; Lewis, 2001; Nikolajeva & Scott, 2001; Nodelman, 1988; Sipe, 1998; Taberner, 2005; Van-der-Linden, 2006 & 2013; Zaparaín & González, 2010).

In addition, illustrating poetry is a process that is different to illustrating storytelling, notably due to the special features of the lyrical genre (Ramos, 2014). This is clearly visible in *I carry your heart with me*, as in this poem there is a generalisable communicative situation, marked by the lack of lexical definition generated between the poetic I and the internal recipient of the verses, enhanced by the neutrality of grammatical genders in English.

In "*I carry your heart with me*", the "I" that takes over the poetic voice and the "you" who is the recipient of the verses (also visible in "*your heart*" or "*Darling*") are open to several types of concretion by the reader. The open nature of the poem's meaning makes the person in charge of its visual adaptation be obliged to make a decision in terms of its meaning, thus imposing an interpretation to the recipient. Therefore, his/her interpretation of the verses is already conditioned by this fact. This is what happens in the advertisement of "*Eternity*" and the picture book by Mati McDonough, as we will see in detail hereinafter.

In first place, both the advertisement and the book rely on the poem's decontextualisation process. This process is inserted in a different medium to that of its original communicative situation, as it is standard practice in poetry that compositions are included in poetry books together with other poetic texts.

In second place, a clear segmentation phenomenon takes places, as the poem is divided into a series of sequences (nineteen in the case of the advertisement; twelve in the case of the

album) that are combined with images and condition its reception. However, there is a significant difference between both adaptations in this respect: while the book is complete, the advertising lack the middle verses.

In any case, the common features of the adaptations of the poem to these two different formats arise when text and visual code are combined, as images are an immediate concretion of the undefined aspects of the poem and turn it into a text on love between parents and their children.

Such concretion of the poem through a visual code involves several essential interpretative aspects when it comes to provide a specific version of the verses. Neira-Piñeiro (2016) includes the following function of illustration when it comes to adapt already existing poems to the picture book format: providing a visual representation of the poetic voice, which thus becomes a character through illustration; describing and contextualising verses, and therefore the reader is provided with information on the characters, objects and situations; adding a story, in other words, creating a story on the basis of the verses; and, in last place, providing merely visual elements, such as metaphors and symbols. All these aspects can be found both in the advertising of Calvin Klein and in the picture book by Mati McDonough.

In first, given the fact that the poetic voice and the internal recipient are undetermined in the poem by Cummings, the advertising and the picture book concretise both aspects by combining text and images. In the case of the advertising, the poetic voice is shared between two characters, one man and one woman, who recite the verses to a little girl, both with voice-overs and diegetic dialogues in it. As a matter of fact, in the second sequence, after a prelude with a beach on a sunny day and a male voice reciting the first part of the first verse ("I carry your heart with me"), there is a close-up of the little girl with that same background voice, reciting the rest of such verse ("I carry it in my

heart"). Therefore, the internal recipient is identified from the beginning. On its part, in the picture book by McDonough, the identification of the poetic voice with the mother takes place in the cover, where we can see a pregnant woman staring at her belly calmly smiling, embracing it lovingly. The first sequence reproduces this same image and, in the second sequence, she already has a baby in her arms, the recipient of the verses throughout the book, in different stages of growth.

In this sense, both formats offer the recipient a specific situation where the verses are framed. Therefore, a succession of a series of pictures of the family shared by the parents and their daughter is displayed both in the advertisement and the picture book, characterised by loving gestures that are the overarching element of all these situations. Nevertheless, several differences between the advertisement and the picture book can be found in this sense. In the case of the former, the location is undetermined, white is the main colour and affects both the characters and the place where they are, too neutral and barely recognisable as a real family context. This aspect is also enhanced with the first close-ups and the black and white photography. Additionally, as the visual work is brief, there are constant time cuts and narrativity's potential is only outlined. On the other hand, in the case of the latter, the relationship between the mother and the little girl is displayed throughout the sequences, where we can see the two of them in different situations and places, ranging from a house to the city and the countryside, with nature playing a key role. In the end, the girl leaves with a backpack on her back as the mother says goodbye in the same angle than in the first sequence.

Finally, the visual style selected also conditions the poem's reception and has a direct impact on its interpretations, as both cases present a consistent aesthetic option throughout all the sequences. As we stated, the advertising of Calvin Klein relies on the prevalence of white to create a neat, minimalist atmosphere where

a highly idealised situation takes place. On her part, McDonough creates a collage in her picture book, using colours, round shapes and natural references as visual metaphors.

Therefore, the poem *I carry your heart with me* is reinterpreted through its adaptation to two different formats with the prevalence of the visual code, as a poem of filial love. This reading is directly offered to the recipient, who received the verses linked to the images and builds its meaning based on the combination of both codes. The resulting product in both cases has high aesthetic values and while the ultimate aim of the producers of the advertisement is not inspiring this type of response, it can arise in a similar way to that of a poetry picture books, as that of McDonough.

Analysis of the responses posted on YouTube

As explained above, the advertising of “Eternity” was shared by the company through its YouTube official channel on 19th October 2017. On the date on which this analyse was closed (15th August 2018), it had 491,736 views, totalling four thousand positive feedback (under the form of Likes), 377 negative feedback (under the form of Unlikes) and 396 comments, most of them around the date on which it was posted on the web. Two types can be identified: direct comments (222) are feedback about the advertisement; indirect comments are feedback about

and responses to direct comments under the form of threads (174). This analysis only focuses on the latter, as they are immediate reactions to the advertisement.

In order to analyse these comments, we created an *ad hoc* classification that includes the following categories:

1. Aesthetic feedback: focuses on the advertisement’s beauty, its aesthetic values -total or partial- or the characters’ beauty.
2. Ethical feedback: focuses on social and ethical aspects of the advertisement, highlighting the family, social and racial values that are undoubtedly therein.
3. Emotional feedback: from-the-gut, poorly thought out responses that do not focus on aesthetic or ethical aspects but instead evaluate the advertising from an emotional point of view.
4. Literary feedback: highlights the beauty of the verses of the advertisement or associate them to a specific author.
5. Consumerist feedback: refers to aspects related to the purchase or acquisition of the marketed product.
6. Sundry: cannot be included in the preceding categories.

The distribution of the various types of comments are shown in figure 1. In this figure, we can see the clear predominance of aesthetic feedback of the advertising, followed by ethical

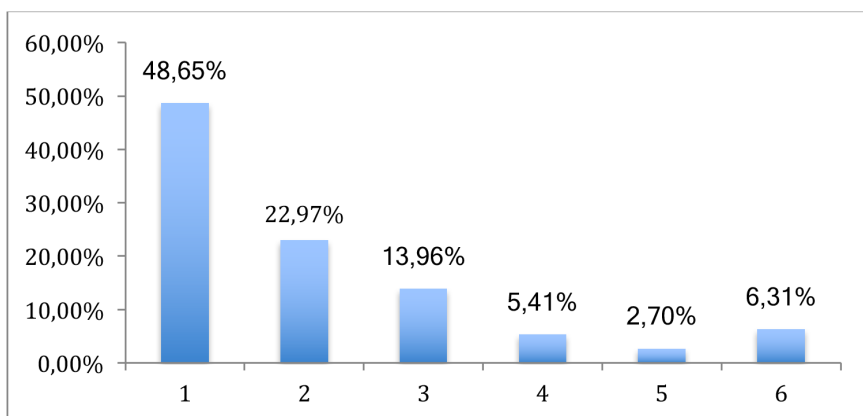


Figure 1. Responses to the advertisement of *Eternity* posted on Youtube.

feedback, although there is greater interaction among users in the case of the latter.

As far as aesthetic feedback is concerned (108), one-word short responses prevail, qualifying and evaluating the advertisement in general terms that are normally positive, without highlighting the reasons thereof (“Aw this was so sweet”; “Wow. Absolutely beautiful”; “Love it...love it ...love it!”; “This is the cutest shit I’ve ever seen”; “Adorable”; “Love it”; “Awww”). There is also a significant number of comments that focus on the characters’ beauty, notably Jake Gyllenhaal (“Jake I love you”; “Jake Gyllenhaal is a beautiful man”), but Liya Kebede too (“Liya Kebede is a goddess”; “Liya Kebede is so gorgeous”).

As far as ethical feedback is concerned (51), two major groups are identified. On one hand, there is feedback referring to the family aspects of the advertisement. In most of them, it is stated that they seem to be a real family, which is surprising as the main characters are one actor and one model who are very popular (“Are we sure that isn’t his real family because you can’t tell. He seemed so in love with that little girl and the way she looked at him too. My heart”; “The true meaning of a family love”). On the other hand, there is feedback focusing on racial aspects, given the biracial nature of the family that appears on the images (“So timely to have a multiracial family. YES! Bout time”; “More of Hollywood’s mixed-race agenda!”; “If this was a man of colour and a white woman, y’all already know the comment section would look like this: “white genocide”...”Jewish agenda”...etc. “I guess different standards and outrage exist for different context”; “Boycott Calvin Klein for pushing for White Genocide. Boycott Jake Gyllenhaal too”). This type of comments definitely gives rise to more responses and answer, as it is more open to controversy.

On its part, emotional feedback (31) reflects from-the-gut reactions to the advertisement. In most cases, it is explicit and corporal (“My ovaries about burst!”; “Hands up if you want

Jake Gyllenhaal’s babies...”; “Dear mother of God, my heart is going to explode”), but there also are more succinct responses (“Oh my god”; “OH MY GOD”).

As far as literary feedback is concerned (12), most cases only state that Cummings is the poem’s author, sometimes in a neutral way without any further comments (“I carry your heart ... ee cummings...”; “ee cummings...”; “It’s a poem from E.E. Cummings”); while other appreciative comments are also made (“An amazing poem by E.E. Cummings”; “E.e. Cummings. Beautiful”; “amazing e cummings poetry”; “the poem they use [i carry your heart with me(i carry it in) BY E. E. CUMMINGS is such an amazing work of art”) while other insert it in larger evaluations referring to ancillary aspects (“It is unlikely I will ever buy “Eternity”, but I do earnestly appreciate 1) amazing e cummings poetry getting more exposure in mainstream culture and 2) healthy family relationships (especially interracial ones) chosen over the vague, menacing sexuality that most advertising for fragrances tirelessly employs. And I hadn’t seen this long version of the promo”; “Please acknowledge e.e. cummings poetry, Calvin Klein. I find it wonderful that you decided to use one of the most beautiful love poems ever written, but despise you for not acknowledging its author in the description of this video...”). There are different approaches to the poem among these type of comments. Nevertheless, in all cases, excepting only one comment reflecting doubts as to the author (“Does Jake Gyllenhaal come with this? Because... my ovaries That sounds like an e.e cummings poem they’re reciting? Beautiful, if so”), everybody commenting on the advertisement already knew the text and know it is a poetical work. Maybe that is why they do not highlight the beauty of the verses and only make general comments using positive adjectives (“beautiful”, “amazing”, etc.).

As far as merely consumerist feedback is concerned, namely, that referring to aspects linked to the acquisition of the product, they are not numerous (6) and refer to idea of buying

this eau the toilette (“RUNS TO MACYS”; “I will be purchasing this fragrance for the men in my life this Christmas. You guys really won me with this one”; “Now I want a bottle of Eternity”).

In last place, under the “Sundry” heading (14), we may include comments ranging from the participation of Gyllenhal in *Brokeback Mountain* (“Sorry ladies Brokeback changed him”) to a wide range of interpretations (“Why am I getting Beyoncé vibes from this ad?”; “This sorta makes up for the fact he dated Swift”), through the recognition of similarities between the little girl and some relative (“She looks my daughter”) or the identification of the little girl by any user (“Laila’s real name is Size, she is my niece. Adorable”).

Conclusions

There can be no doubt that certain advertisements like this one have clear aesthetic qualities. This is even more plausible as it uses resources that are very similar to those used in the field of illustrated poetry and, more specifically, in the field of poetry picture books that have been previously published, as proven when comparing it to the adaptation by McDonough. In both cases, the use of sequences and their combination with illustrations impose a specific and unequivocal interpretation of the poem by E. E. Cummings, closing its meaning when selecting only one of all possible meanings. Therefore, the reception process of both hybrid proposals is very similar, although there are differences in terms of medium. For this reason, it is not unreasonable to expect that the reactions of the recipients of the advertising of Calvin Klein are of an aesthetic nature.

By classifying and analysing the comments on the advertisement on YouTube, where viewers react spontaneously and not influenced by a context of formal education or preset research, we have found that the aesthetic value of this advertising is undeniable. According most feedback, the advertising is evaluated from this point of view, a significant fact if we

bear in mind that advertisements are created to generate a consumerist reaction in the recipients thereof, not to generate this kind of response. Nevertheless, it is true that such reactions are mostly general and do not focus on specific features of the advertisement. More specifically, upon analysing the comments, we find that there are just a few reactions that focus on the literary dimension of the advertising and highlight the use of a poetic text. Additionally, these reactions belong to users who already knew and identified the poem by E. E. Cummings. Therefore, in all these cases, the reading intertext of viewers is triggered from a merely encyclopaedic point of view. Thus, inserting a poetic text in an advertisement of clear aesthetic values does not result in a strictly literary reception. This is probably due to the fact that the reception context is very far from the communicative situation of the literary discourse and of the poetic discourse more specifically, as it is traditionally linked to school (Andricaín & Orlando, 2016; Calvo, 2015; Cerrillo & Luján, 2010; Cerrillo & Sánchez-Ortiz, 2015; Pullinger, 2017; Styles, 2012; Zipes, 2006).

Nevertheless, this absence of strictly literary reactions does not eliminate the educational-literary potential of this advertisement of “Eternity”. Notably, if we take into account that the main objective of literary education is to acquire literary competence so that all citizens are able to see literature as a differentiated artistic discourse in its various generic manifestations (Cerrillo, 2007, 2017; Colomer, 1998, 2010; Mendoza, 2001, 2004, 2005). From this point of view and combined with a suitable literary mediation in the classroom and outside it, the aesthetic quality and the visual attractiveness make it a valuable instrument for literary education, just like in the case of booktrailers and reading promotion (Lluch, Taberner & Calvo, 2015; Taberner, 2013, 2015a, 2015b, 2016), with which it has many things in common. Through the concretion of essential aspects of lyrical texts, such as poetic voice or the internal recipient, which takes place in the advertisement of “Eternity”, readers can

get better understanding of the features of this genre and the specificity of literary reading. The adaptation to the visual format also shows the polysemy of the poetical fact and the wide range of interpretations implied in any high-quality poetic text (García-Martínez, Rigo & Jiménez, 2017). To sum up, the comparative analysis of the advertisement of Calvin Klein and the picture book of Mati McDonough shows that the adaptation of poetry to other media does not pauperise its potential in terms of meaning, but it also highlights other more important features of the lyrical genre with regard to literary education.

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